



WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH IN OREGON

*From The
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health*



State Profile 2002

*Delivering on the Nation's promise:
Safety and health at work for all people through prevention.*

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

NIOSH is the primary federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related illness and injury. NIOSH is located in the Department of Health and Human Services in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The NIOSH mission is to provide national and world leadership to prevent work-related illness, injury, disability, and death by gathering information, conducting scientific research, and translating the knowledge gained into products and services. As part of its mission, NIOSH supports programs in every state to improve the health and safety of workers. NIOSH has developed this document to highlight recent NIOSH programs important to workers and employers in Oregon.

The Burden of Occupational Illness and Injury in Oregon

- In Oregon, there are approximately 1.7 million individuals employed in the workforce.¹
- In 2000, 52 workers died as a result of workplace injuries.²
- The manufacturing industry had the highest number of fatalities, followed by the transportation and public utilities industry and the agriculture, forestry, and fishing industry.²
- In 1999, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate of fatal workplace injuries was 4.2 deaths per 100,000 workers – below the national average rate of 4.5 deaths per 100,000 workers.²
- In 2000, there were 81,400 nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses in Oregon.³

The Cost of Occupational Injury and Illness in Oregon

In 2000, the most recent year for which data are available, a total of \$412.7 million was paid for workers' compensation claims by Oregon private insurers, self-insured employers, and state funds.⁴ This figure does not include compensation paid to workers employed by the federal government and also underestimates the total financial burden for private sector businesses, since only a fraction of health care costs and earnings lost through work injuries and illnesses is covered by workers' compensation. Chronic occupational illnesses like cancer are substantially under-reported in workers' compensation systems because work-relatedness is often difficult to establish.

How NIOSH Prevents Worker Injuries and Diseases in Oregon

Health Hazard Evaluations (HHEs) and Technical Assistance

NIOSH evaluates workplace hazards and recommends solutions when requested by employers, workers, or state or federal agencies. Since 1993, NIOSH has responded to 54 requests for HHEs in Oregon in a variety of industrial settings, including the following example:

Bend, Oregon: Exposure Assessment of Water-Based Tree Marking Paint

In 2000, NIOSH responded to a request for an HHE from the United States Forest Service, Office of Natural Resources. The request listed nausea, rashes, headaches, and dizziness as symptoms reported by foresters who use a water-based paint to mark trees in national forests. NIOSH industrial hygienists conducted an exposure assessment under conditions of high ambient temperature, low relative humidity, and work-crew sizes of eight to nine persons per day. It was concluded that using the type of tree-marking paint evaluated in this HHE, under these conditions, did not present a health hazard to the work crews.

Building State Capacity

State-Based Surveillance

NIOSH funds the Adult Blood Lead Epidemiology and Surveillance Program (ABLES) in the Oregon Department of Human Services. Through ABLES, the agency's staff can track and respond to cases of excessive lead exposure in adults which can cause a variety of adverse health outcomes such as kidney or nervous system damage and potential infertility. In addition, NIOSH funds the Sentinel Event Notification System for Occupational Risk, or SENSOR, through which the agency's staff track and develop interventions for specific occupational diseases and injuries such as acute pesticide-related illness.

Extramural Programs Funded by NIOSH

The following are examples of recent research grants or cooperative agreements funded by NIOSH in the state of Oregon.

Partnership to Reduce Workers' Compensation Claim Costs

NIOSH is funding a collaboration within Oregon to address the differences in data between the state-mandated workers' compensation system and the system of private insurers and self-insured companies. The goal of this effort is to create a common database which will allow comparison of illness and injury claims and provide a better understanding of trends and patterns of claims.

Pesticide Training for Adolescent Migrant Farmworkers

With support from NIOSH, researchers at Oregon Health Sciences University will evaluate the effectiveness of pesticide safety training materials that are commonly available to migrant adolescent farmworkers. Most migrant farmworkers are poorly educated and do not speak English as a primary language. Few pesticide safety training methods have been evaluated for non-English speaking populations and no studies have addressed the effectiveness of such training for adolescent migrant farmworkers. The educational interventions that will be used in this project build upon previous community-based projects and involve collaboration with organizations that serve the Latino agricultural community. Results will provide a model for future educational intervention research targeting this vulnerable population.

Effectiveness of Computer-Based Training

U.S. corporations spend between \$55 and \$60 billion per year to provide two billion hours of training to 60 million employees. Over 100 U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration workplace standards require training to minimize the risk of disease or injury. However, health and safety specialists have few tools to provide cost-effective, customized training. To address this issue, researchers at Oregon University have developed “cTRAIN,” a computer-based training program that includes a "screenbuilder" for entering content to create new programs. The program features intuitive operation; allows for computer-generated spoken English, Spanish, or other language options for all text; provides immediate feedback on tests; and generates a simple report on trainees’ performance. With support from NIOSH, a systematic evaluation will be conducted of the program’s intervention effectiveness.

Additional information regarding NIOSH services and activities can be accessed through the NIOSH home page at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html> or by calling the NIOSH 800-number at 1-800-356-NIOSH (1-800-356-4674).

¹U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Current Population Survey, 2000.

²DOL, BLS in cooperation with state and federal agencies, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1999-2000.

³DOL, BLS in cooperation with participating state agencies, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, 2000.

⁴National Academy of Social Insurance, *Workers’ Compensation: Benefits, Coverage, and Costs, 2000 New Estimates*, May 2002.

